

EMBARGOED until 12:01am, October 28, 2020

To request an advance copy of the report or arrange an interview, please contact:
José Ramón Martí, 647-822-1731, jose.marti@samaracanada.com

Canadians increasingly satisfied with democracy, less likely to express populist sentiments, new report finds

Shift toward greater trust and unity is particularly strong in Canada, comparative data show

Toronto, October 28, 2020—The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted Canadians' lives, heightened economic uncertainties, and placed tremendous strain on people's physical and mental health. And yet, despite facing one of the toughest years in memory, 8 in 10 Canadians report being very or fairly satisfied with their democracy—a marked jump from just the year before—according to a new study from the Samara Centre for Democracy.

Drawing on in-depth, national public opinion data from 2019 and 2020, the Samara Centre examines how the crisis has altered Canadians' views toward their democratic system, public institutions, and political leaders in a report entitled **Temperature Check: Canadian democratic attitudes in a pandemic**.

The data show a clear and consistent shift has occurred during the pandemic:

- Canadians' satisfaction with democracy reached new highs;
- Canadians gained more trust in government, and in one another—the share of Canadians who think “most people can be trusted” jumped from 37% in 2019 to 45% in 2020;
- Canadians became somewhat less cynical about political leaders, less nostalgic for the past, and considerably less likely to express populist sentiments—only 34% of Canadians said they trust “ordinary people” over “elites,” down from 47% in 2019; and
- Despite major positive change in public attitudes, Canadians were no more likely to feel that they have a say in what governments do.

While other countries have also experienced increases in trust and satisfaction with governments during the crisis, comparative data show that this shift toward greater unity and trust is particularly strong in Canada.

“We talk a lot about declining trust in government and democracy, but the reality is that Canadians are actually fairly trusting, especially right now,” notes Dr. Michael Morden, Interim Executive Director at the Samara Centre. “The question we need to ask ourselves is, ‘How can that public trust help us through this crisis and beyond?’” he adds.

As the country enters a pivotal moment in its history, the report recommends that political leaders reward that public trust by empowering Canadians to take a more active role in shaping their post-pandemic future—by holding Citizens’ Assemblies to jointly decide on policy priorities, by giving citizens more control over the parliamentary agenda, or by using digital tools to foster two-way conversations with constituents.

“Times of emergency can erode trust and shatter social cohesion, or they can actually serve to bring citizens closer together,” Morden observes. “The pandemic has produced a unique civic moment, one that governments should seize upon by giving Canadians a stronger voice in building our post-pandemic country.”

Please contact José Ramón Martí if you would like to receive an advance copy of **Temperature Check** or request an interview with a Samara Centre spokesperson.

**The report will be available at 12:01 a.m. on October 28, 2020, at:
samaracanada.com/temperature-check**

About the Methodology

The Samara Centre is a member of the Consortium on Electoral Democracy (C-Dem), a unique partnership of academic researchers and civil society groups working to monitor Canada’s democracy in real time. The data was taken from C-Dem’s Democracy Check-Up, an annual, large-scale, online survey first conducted from May to August 2019, and repeated in May 2020. Spanning the periods before and soon after the arrival of the pandemic, it offers insight into how the Canadian democratic mindset has changed. C-Dem is led from Western University, Université du Québec à Montréal, University of Toronto, and Ryerson University.

About the Samara Centre for Democracy

The Samara Centre for Democracy (formerly Samara Canada) is a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada’s democracy, making it more accessible, responsive, and inclusive. The Samara Centre produces action-based research—as well as tools and resources for active citizens and public leaders—designed to engage Canadians in their democracy. To learn more about how our research and educational programming is building better politics and a better Canada, visit samaracanada.com.

